

The Edict of Milan

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ous fact that, as Rome's conquering eagles flew Lithera afield, the legions and the merchants who followed in their track brought all manner of strange gods to the city, where every wandering Chaldean augur, magician, or soothsayer found welcome and profit, and every stray goddess—especially

her rites had mysteries attached to them received a comfortable home. In a word, Rome found new religions just as fascinating—for a season or two—as do the capitals of the modern world, and these new religions were certainly not publicly limited by the *Pontifex Maximus* and the representatives of the State religion. Occasionally, usually after some outbreak of pestilence or because the Emperor was nervous at the presence of so many rascally charlatans devoting themselves to the black Arts, an order of expulsion would be issued and there would be a fluttering of the doves, as they came creeping back one by one as the storm blew over. While, therefore, in theory the gods of Rome were jealous, in practice they were not so. The easy scepticism or eclecticism of the cultured Roman was conducive to tolerance! Nero's famous sentence in the *Vespasianic*, "Each state has its own religion, let us have ours!" shows how little of the religious fanatic there was

the average Roman, who stole the gods of the people he conquered and made them his own, so that they might acquiesce in the Roman domination, the Roman was tolerant enough in private life towards other people's religious convictions; all that was reciprocity, and that was precisely what